

Sermon
The Second Sunday of Advent
December 7th, 2025
Church of the Ascension, Ottawa
The Reverend Victoria Scott

Readings: [ISAIAH 11:1-10; PSALM 72:1-7, 18-19; ROMANS 15:4-13;](#)
[MATTHEW 3:1-12](#)

Many of you have heard me mention our cabin just outside Sharbot Lake. The road to access it moves from highway, to gravel road, to a path through the trees and down a hill to the clearing where the cabin sits. We do a lot of walking and hiking while we're there. It's on about 50 acres, and sometimes we venture into the bush, but other times we stick to the gravel road. One October, Annabel and I set out on a late afternoon walk, deciding to stick to the gravel road to make it easier. That road winds its way for several kilometres before reaching the highway, and we walked and talked for quite a long way before deciding to head back to the cabin. The darkness deepened, and the terrain became unfamiliar even though I thought I knew it - I began to question the bends and turns, unsure of how much farther that turn through the trees down the hill to the cabin actually was. Eventually, we reached that path through the trees, and we caught sight of the glow of light through the cabin windows. What a feeling that was - relief, we had made our way home.

**but straight
glad feet fearruining
and glorygirded
faces

lead us
into the
serious
steep

darkness**

e.e. cummings ends one of his poems with this striking stanza.

Glad feet. Fearruining. Glorygirded faces.

At first glance, “glad feet fearruining” sounds as though fear is ruining our gladness—tripping us up just as we try to move forward. But the word can turn in the other direction: our **glad, willing feet** can **ruin fear** simply by taking the next step. Fear diminishes not because we banish it, but because we walk anyway.

And “glorygirded faces”—faces wrapped in light—remind us that courage is not the absence of fear but the presence of God’s steadying grace.

Advent invites us into this very posture: stepping forward with gladness and trembling at once, trusting that glory accompanies us even as we enter what cummings calls the “serious steep darkness.” Darkness not as threat, but as the terrain where transformation begins, the place of germination and waiting.

This longing for steady steps and trustworthy guidance meets us in Isaiah’s breathtaking vision of peace. The wolf shall live with the lamb. The child shall play over the adder’s den. Creation reordered in harmony and hope. When we hear this vision, we, too, long to be shown the way to such wholeness. We long for the path toward the peace of God.

Isaiah’s audience knew exile. They were far from home—not only geographically, but spiritually, emotionally, communally. Walter Brueggemann reminds us that *exile is more than geographical... exile is when old securities are gone*. They had lost the structures that gave their lives meaning. They were homesick in every sense.

And many of us, for many reasons, know that kind of homesickness. We know what it is to feel unmoored or dislocated, to long for grounding, belonging, and peace.

Into that longing comes John the Baptist. His voice crying in the wilderness—“*Prepare the way of the Lord!*”—can feel overwhelming. How

do we prepare the way? How do we find the path when the landscape of our lives seems to shift?

A path, a trail, a route—each offers an image for our spiritual journey.

A **path** is well worn.

A **trail** leads through wilder places and sometimes fades.

A **route** is improvised—finding a way around obstacles like rushing water or unstable ground.

The spiritual life is often all three. Advent meets us in whatever terrain we find ourselves, inviting us to take the next faithful step—*glad feet fearruining*—trusting that courage grows through movement, and that God walks with us.

In *The First Christmas*, Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan describe repentance—*metanoia*—as returning from exile to God's presence. In the Hebrew scriptures, to repent is to **come home**. In the New Testament, *metanoia* deepens this: to **go beyond the mind you have**, to **see differently**.

Preparing “the way of the Lord” is about learning to perceive differently—recognizing the husks that hinder our homecoming and choosing the path that reconnects us with God, with one another, and with creation.

This is why John's image of wheat and chaff matters. It isn't about separating good people from bad people. Each grain of wheat has its husk. Farmers use wind to loosen the husk so that the nourishing grain can be gathered. The goal is always to **save the grain**.

We, too, have husks: fear, apathy, self-absorption, harsh judgment—anything that obscures our sense of belonging or blocks our return to God's peace. John's call is not designed to burden us with guilt but to free us, to prepare us for the One who baptizes with the Holy Spirit and with fire—a refining fire that burns away only what cannot sustain life.

And so we return again to cummings' stanza. "Glad feet fearruining" and "glorygirded faces" offer us an image of repentance not as sorrow or shame, but as **courage**: the willingness to step forward even when we cannot see the whole way. The trust that God's glory surrounds us—that we are girded, held, accompanied. The readiness to be led "but straight" into the mystery where God is already at work.

Marilyn Chandler McEntyre's poem *What to Do in the Darkness* offers wisdom for such a season:

Go slowly.

Consent to it.

Know it as a place of germination and growth.

Find the path by walking in it.

Practice trust.

Watch for dawn.

This is Advent spirituality. This is choosing to walk with glad feet that undo fear. This is letting God lead us into the steep places where new life is waiting to emerge.

Isaiah's vision of the shoot from the stump of Jesse reminds us that new life springs from what looks cut down, dormant, or finished. God leads God's people home. And we, too, are promised that new life will emerge—often where we least expect it.

For us, as Christians, Jesus is the one who shows us the way home. Whether we find ourselves on a path, a trail, or a makeshift route, God continually invites us toward connection, belovedness, peace, and wholeness.

May we, this Advent, take the next glad step—however small—trusting that each step can undo fear.

And may our steps create paths, trails, and routes for others on their way home.

Amen.

This makes “the way of the Lord” the path of return from exile to God’s presence. To repent is to see differently, and to follow the way that leads out of our exile, separation, alienation and estrangement to reconnection: with God and with each other.

Cummings gives us a striking image of the spiritual life when he writes of “glad feet fearruining.” At first, it sounds as though fear threatens to ruin our gladness. But the word can turn in the other direction too—because in the very act of stepping forward, those glad and willing feet *ruin fear itself*. They diminish its power simply by refusing to stop. This is the paradox of faith: we move into the unknown with both joy and trembling, and yet it is the movement—the willingness—that breaks fear’s hold on us. Our faces, “glorygirded,” are not confident because we are unafraid, but because we carry the light of a purpose greater than our fear. So God leads us “but straight,” with honest courage: not around the difficult terrain, but into the “serious steep” darkness where trust grows, where fear is undone, and where new life waits to be discovered.